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ABSTRACT

Despite the conventional wisdom that comprehensive services are an essential element in the support of children and families, over the past several decades programs and services have continued to be disconnected, separately funded, and provided by these multiple agencies. The need for local intermediaries has emerged through the devolution of decision making from the federal to local level, the decentralization of schools and their support networks, and the rise in networking in social services delivery. Intermediary organizations typically carry out activities related to four major functions: (1) engaging, convening, and supporting critical constituencies to increase public involvement, design new initiatives, strengthen local institutions, and achieve tangible results; (2) promoting quality standards and accountability for continuous improvement and to demonstrate positive outcomes; (3) brokering and leveraging resources by increasing the efficiency and impact of service providers and attracting resources that individual organizations often cannot secure on their own; and (4) promoting effective policies that can strengthen local organizations and result in more effective services for young people and families. In order for local intermediaries to achieve their full potential they need to be: recognized for their value; included in legislation and regulations; funded; and connected to each other. (Includes 3 endnotes, a list of resources, local intermediary contact information and a Partners for the Intermediaries Report.) (MO)

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ED 480 445

Local Intermediary Organizations:

Connecting the Dots for Children, Youth, and Families

Preface

Supporting systems and services that nurture children, youth, and families as they grow and develop is the common agenda for the six organizations that have contributed to this brief. Through numerous interactions, the authors have each come to realize how intermediary organizations are improving systems that support our youngest children, our school-age children, our youth transitioning to adulthood, and their families and communities. We believe that local intermediaries have the potential to help revitalize and reform the delivery of services to children, youth, and families. By joining forces in publishing this piece, we seek to make a strong case for the critical role and value of intermediary organizations.

The authors would like to thank the many individuals, both inside and outside our organizations, who assisted in the development and content of this brief. We are grateful to Jessica Deutsch, who prepared the early drafts of this document, patiently working with the authors as we refined our ideas and thinking on this issue. We also would like to thank the leaders of the intermediary organizations, who willingly shared their experiences with us during the development of this brief. Finally, we wish to acknowledge the assistance of various funders who support our organizations: The Carnegie Corporation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, and the Wallace Reader's Digest Fund.

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Introduction

Over the past several decades, policy makers and program planners have come to understand that children, youth, and families need a range of supports and services to live healthy, productive lives. While conventional wisdom supports the belief that comprehensive services are an essential element in the support of children and families, programs and services, in reality, still mirror the old approach—disconnected services, separate funding streams, and multiple agencies providing services. In an era of tight resources and increased local responsibility for programs and services, communities are experimenting with new ways to connect the service dots for children and families. Local intermediary organizations are a promising approach to efficiently and effectively connecting and delivering a range of supportive services.

Across the nation, local intermediaries are emerging to address a wide range of family, education, social, and economic challenges. Typically, local intermediary organizations engage in one or more of the following tasks:

- *Engaging, convening, and supporting critical constituencies.* Local intermediary organizations bring together diverse constituencies to increase public involvement, design new initiatives, strengthen local institutions, and achieve tangible results.
- *Promoting quality standards and accountability.* Local intermediary organizations help service providers identify standards for assessing service quality and use data more effectively to promote continuous improvement and demonstrate positive outcomes.
- *Brokering and leveraging resources.* Local intermediary organizations broker and leverage diverse public and private resources. This involves increasing the efficiency and impact of service providers and attracting resources that individual organizations often cannot secure on their own.
- *Promoting effective policies.* Local intermediary organizations educate elected officials, funders, and policy makers about specific policies and investments that can strengthen local organizations and promote more effective services for young people and families

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Across the country, in big cities, smaller towns, and rural areas, intermediary organizations are improving the ability of local organizations to bring multiple stakeholders together, promote and provide quality services, mobilize political support, and attract private- and public-sector resources. Intermediaries are also energizing local residents, service deliverers, and political leaders to imagine and embrace better ways of helping children and families.

Local intermediaries are supporting and strengthening the efforts of many organizations that serve children, youth, and families across a range of policy areas, including:

- early care and education
- after-school, youth development, community and school partnerships, and other services for school-age children and youth
- workforce development and economic self-sufficiency.

More specifically, intermediaries are helping improve the quality of child care for low-income families; the quality and availability of after-school options for elementary, middle, and high school-age youth; the relationship between schools and their communities; the regularity and effectiveness of links between education and employment for teens; and the implementation of integrated neighborhood-building strategies to support healthy communities.

These organizations are filling real needs in their communities, yet they still face serious challenges that mirror those of their child-, youth-, and family-serving partners. To sustain themselves, these organizations must find funding; demonstrate results; accept accountability for outcomes; and work to expand their scale and scope without a diminution of quality and effectiveness.

This brief is intended to introduce policy makers and program developers to local intermediary organizations and to demonstrate the potential of these organizations in helping local communities achieve important policy goals. It addresses the following questions:

- Why are intermediaries becoming more common and visible now?
- What do effective intermediaries do? What functions do intermediaries perform?
- What impact are intermediaries having on efforts to help young people and families develop and succeed?

In each section that follows, this brief includes examples of intermediary organizations working to assist community organizations and program leaders. Most of the organizations profiled are still in their infancy. They are experimenting with different ways to structure themselves, finance their work, market their services, and deliver consistently high-quality services to the organizations with which they work. The list at the end of this brief contains additional information regarding the intermediaries cited in the examples.

Why Local Intermediary Organizations Are Emerging Now

Several trends have contributed to the emergence of local intermediaries. These include devolution, economic decentralization, and networking in social services delivery.

Devolution

During the past two decades, legislation and regulatory mandates across many policy areas have pushed decision making, administration, and delivery of services from federal down to state and from state down to local levels (e.g., welfare, workforce development, health care, social services). "States have assumed increasing responsibility for the design and administration of social policy and for the ultimate success or failure of the resulting programs," according to the Center for the Study of Social Policy, and "have also been given greater flexibility in determining which social goals to focus on and how to best meet them." At the same time, devolution has prompted greater flexibility, responsiveness, and local accountability, and has led to increased complexity, coordination challenges, and administrative fragmentation in local communities. This environment has created an urgent need for mechanisms to simplify and coordinate across different programs and policy areas at the local level. Intermediaries are one response to this challenge.

Economic Decentralization

American institutions—schools, corporations, and nonprofit organizations—tend to evolve in response to new economic realities and dynamics. Just as corporate structures adjust to new challenges and opportunities, other institutions tend to follow suit.

In the last decades of the 20th century, businesses found the vertical integration and centralized industrial organization of the 1900s to be increas-

ingly ineffective. To become more competitive in an increasingly complex and global environment, businesses applied new flexible strategies—decentralization, lean production, joint ventures, and networking. The same trends are observable in education and other public policy arenas. Schools are moving away from large "factory models" of one-size-fits-all schools in favor of smaller "learning communities." Educators are discovering the need for alliances and networks to connect them to community organizations, local governments, and peers in other communities. In the social services arena, intermediary organizations are like the brokers, conveners, and standard-setters that facilitate decentralized economic activity in the corporate world. Their presence is becoming critical for nurturing the learning, partnership development, and collaboration that community groups need to succeed.

Networking in Social Services Delivery

The rise of intermediaries has been described as "part of a broad trend...toward fluid, networked, and interactive systems for organizing multi-partner communications and collaboration. As innovative, project specific, and goal-oriented partnerships are emerging, so too are organizations to broker and simplify these relationships."

Across service domains, intermediary organizations are responding to the need for effective ways to foster and manage collaboration. They can create order out of often confusing legislative mandates, keep partners focused on a shared vision, and help make "strategic decisions about how services are provided, and who is accountable for the results that ensue." In short, they make it easier for partners to come together, learn together, and jointly be accountable for the well-being of children, families, and communities.

The Four Functions of Local Intermediary Organizations

Intermediary organizations typically carry out activities related to four major functions:

- engaging, convening, and supporting critical constituencies
- promoting quality standards and accountability
- brokering and leveraging resources
- promoting effective policy.

This section describes each of these four functions and provides examples from the work of nine intermediaries.

Engaging, Convening, and Supporting Key Constituencies

Local intermediary organizations bring together diverse constituencies to increase public involvement, launch new initiatives, strengthen local institutions, and achieve tangible results.

As modern life becomes more complex and fast paced, the impetus toward more flexible, manageable, and efficient human connections intensifies. Organizations seeking to work together need a mechanism for coordinating, collaborating, and overcoming barriers to efficiency and effectiveness.

As convening bodies, intermediary organizations bring local constituencies and their leadership together around an intentional agenda, promote broad public participation, accelerate learning and improvement, and focus attention and resources on the achievement of tangible results.

Through their convening function, intermediaries are "setting the table" around which the different stakeholders meet to plan and strategize new initiatives. As neutral arbiters, intermediaries are able to position themselves to build strong, meaningful, and purposeful relationships across organizations that deliver services. Across the nation, intermediaries are pulling together like-minded groups and helping them see the benefits of greater collaboration and coordination of efforts when serving the same population. Because they are typically not service deliverers themselves, intermediaries can help providers focus less on turf issues and more on the outcomes that are important to the entire community.

In 1995, the ***Hamilton County/Chattanooga Public Education Fund*** was asked to convene the planning for a highly emotional and politically charged "merger" of the city and county school systems. Hamilton County needed a neutral facilitator that would make sure all voices were heard. Remaining "just a little outside all the time," the Fund was able to bring people together and weather the inevitable political storms. Both the schools and the community view the policy decision to merge as a solid success and consider the intermediary's role critical to that success.

In Austin, Texas, the ***Capital Area Training Foundation (CATF)*** acts as the local intermediary to support school-to-work efforts. This group regularly brings together employers, school leaders, government officials, and other community partners to plan programs that serve their mutual interests in developing an educated and skilled workforce. By

establishing and staffing industry advisory councils, CATF provides a venue for significant numbers of employers to enter into ongoing collaboration with local school districts and economic development officials.

Establishing Quality Standards and Promoting Accountability

Local intermediary organizations help service providers identify standards for assessing service quality and use data more effectively to promote positive outcomes and continuous program improvements.

As partnerships mature, they move from developing a shared mission and set of goals to tackling common issues. In the social services arena, these issues often include raising the bar on the quality of programs and promoting accountability within programs and the community. Intermediary organizations are well-positioned to make a difference in this area for two major reasons.

First, having forged new relationships among organizations across the community, intermediaries can be pivotal in identifying and keeping open the lines of communication about quality and accountability. "What are we trying to accomplish together?" "Who is responsible for which aspects of this process?" "How will we measure success?" These fundamental questions about results and accountability are at the heart of many intermediaries' efforts.

Not surprisingly, intermediaries are also quite focused on measuring their own success. This process, however, is complicated by the fact that intermediaries are often funded by different organizations than those they serve (e.g., they may be funded by foundations and serve community organizations). Being accountable in two directions requires intermediaries to develop more complex methods of measuring their outcomes, while balancing the needs of funders and clients.

In rural North Carolina, the ***Orange County Partnership*** has been working to improve the quality of care for its youngest citizens. When the Partnership began, only about one third of local child care programs met quality standards and few were accredited. With a focus on quality improvements, the Orange County Partnership has worked with program leaders to increase the number of accredited centers and certified teachers. With the assistance of the Partnership, more than 70 percent of young children in Orange County are now in care situations that have received national accreditation or the highest quality rating from the state's system.

The ***Community Network for Youth Development (CNYD)*** in San Francisco provides technical assistance, training, and resources to support youth development programs and practices in a variety of agencies that serve youth. Through its Youth Development Program Outcomes Project, CNYD is helping agencies develop assessment techniques that support continuous program improvement. By assisting programs in developing outcome measures that build on best practices and support community goals, CNYD is building the capacity of programs to deliver higher-quality services.

Brokering and Leveraging Community Resources

Local intermediary organizations broker and leverage a wide range of resources on behalf of their constituents—helping to increase the efficiency and impact of service providers and to attract resources that individual organizations often cannot secure on their own.

Community-based nonprofit organizations are often waging an uphill battle for the essential prerequisites for their work. Funding may be the most obvious example of scarce resources, but the list is longer. Resources related to staffing, space, time, technology, arrangement of in-kind contributions, management, and organizational development are also in scarce supply.

Given their relationships to so many organizations, and their foot in the door with wider support networks, local intermediary organizations can act as brokers, helping programs leverage critical resources. This may include:

- increasing access to existing funding opportunities
- retooling the way existing funding sources are used
- acting as a fiscal agent to streamline services
- training local organizations in effective finance strategies
- working to increase available funding and resources.

Some local intermediaries have taken on "back office" functions that increase the efficacy of the direct service organizations—managing data systems, providing staff to conduct professional-development training, and working with business partners on legal activities. The more latitude local intermediary organizations are given to broker and leverage existing services and resources, the more their constituents can remain "focused on the prize," undertaking needed direct services for children, families, and communities.

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Another benefit gained when intermediaries take on the role of resource developers is a more efficient use of time and money. By focusing on the needs of many service providers in the community, intermediaries can match scarce resources with organizational needs, spreading the wealth and taking advantage of multiple opportunities. Intermediaries can also help programs be more efficient in their own use of funds by creating purchasing pools and other mechanisms to reduce costs.

- ***Bridges to Success (BTS)*** in Indianapolis is an innovative effort to make schools the centers of their communities by creating opportunities for educators, health and human services agencies, community and youth development agencies, and families to come together to improve student learning, strengthen families, and build healthier neighborhoods. With the United Way of Central Indiana playing the role of intermediary, over $3 million has been leveraged for BTS from a variety of partners, including the school system, United Way, neighborhood based community centers, a teachers' union, the recreation department, a local university, the mayor's office, the Chamber of Commerce, and private funders. BTS is now working to add health, mental health, recreation, career exploration, service learning, and other supportive services for parents, teachers, and neighbors in 43 community schools.

- ***The After School Corporation (TASC)*** took on the role of after school intermediary in New York City in 1998, with the support of George Soros' Open Society Institute. TASC's bread and butter services include resource development, training and technical assistance to program staff, and capacity building opportunities for community based groups. TASC has also worked to bring in additional dollars—generating $3 of public funding for every $1 of private money granted by the Open Society Institute. Because TASC takes the leading role in securing long term funding, programs are better able to focus on delivering quality services.

- ***The Urban Strategies Council*** in Oakland, California is a local community building intermediary. Using an asset based approach, Urban Strategies works from the neighborhood to the city and state levels in pursuit of an inclusive strategy for addressing inter-related issues—poor schooling, crime, bad health, unemployment and underemployment, and family instability—that ensnare people in chronic poverty. By bringing together neighborhood residents, community based organizations, schools and local government, Urban Strategies has generated more than $70 million for strategies to enhance after school programs, reduce infant mortality, organize more comprehensive services, and develop community economic development opportunities in recent years.

Promoting Effective Policy

> ***Local intermediary organizations educate elected officials, funders, and policy makers about specific policies and investments that can strengthen local service organizations and promote more effective services for young people and families.***

Intermediary organizations almost always have an active hand in local policy and systems reform. They are also tremendously skilled at educating elected officials and policy makers on specific policies that are likely to lead to more effective services and better results.

Intermediaries have also been helpful in providing policy advice about how programs can more effectively work together for the benefit of children and families. By seeing a full range of programs and services, intermediaries can recommend how duplication can be reduced, emerging needs met, and programs aligned.

- The ***Local Investment Commission (LINC)***, a citizen-led intermediary in Kansas City, Missouri, was created to improve the way social services were delivered, by revamping a rigid bureaucracy to create a system that is responsive to constituent needs. Among LINC's many successes is a redefined relationship between area public and private providers that yielded a "welfare-to-work" system that provides employment and training options for both participants in The Temporary Assistance For Needy Families (TANF) Program and local employers. More than 6,100 persons have been placed through this system, and more than two thirds are still on the job.

- In Massachusetts, the ***Boston Private Industry Council*** joined with other local workforce boards and the state's School to Work Office to petition the legislature to fund the cost of activities that link school and work based learning opportunities for young people. This campaign resulted in a growing commitment from the state to a matching fund that allocates state dollars for connecting activities, based upon the amount of wages local employers pay to students in school-run, work based learning programs. First funded at $500,000 in 1997, partnerships now receive $5 million from the legislature.

The Future of Local Intermediary Organizations

Effective intermediaries add significant value to naturally decentralized, often fragmented systems of supports and opportunities for children, youth, and families. They add value to communities—and they can provide critically important information and support to policy makers who want to improve youth and community services. Properly organized and operated, intermediaries can strengthen and enhance the ability of programs and agencies to achieve their desired outcomes.

The reality, however, is that these institutions are evolving, experimenting, and still finding their way. Intermediaries have great potential, but they, too, face very real organizational and programmatic challenges. To realize their potential as a resource to

local service providers, these organizations must have access to information on effective practices and how they can be adapted to various circumstances. Because they convene, facilitate, and broker other organizations, it is often difficult to define the outcomes for which these organizations should be held directly accountable. And all of these very real dilemmas and challenges must be tackled in an environment where the intermediaries' functions are neither well understood nor adequately funded.

In an era of tight resources and devolving authority, intermediary organizations hold much promise. Recognizing the value of these organizations to their communities, some private foundations, as well as local, state, and federal governments, have begun to provide financial support for intermediaries. However, these investments are limited, sporadic, and lack a systemic strategy for promoting and sustaining these organizations and the important functions they play. As policy makers, program developers, and advocates seek to improve supports and services for children and families, local intermediary organizations can provide an important vehicle for success.

Conclusion

Across the country, local intermediaries are helping communities make better use of resources that support children, youth, and families by weaving together the pieces of a naturally decentralized system of supports and services. Properly organized and operated, intermediary organizations are vehicles for adding strength and capacity to existing programs, institutions, and systems. They also help achieve the results that both policy makers and families seek. Intermediary organizations are adding value by:

- bringing together organizations, professionals, and community members who have never spoken to one another, thereby creating new opportunities for exchange, streamlined administrative processes, and economies of scale
- opening a dialogue between researchers and practitioners to foster and share new kinds of expertise and information
- bringing clout to important issues through partnerships and consensus building
- creating flexibility within systems to adapt and produce *results*.

The power and value of these organizations is just beginning to be known and appreciated by policy makers, particularly at the state and federal levels. For these important emerging entities to achieve their potential, intermediaries need to be:

- **Recognized for their immense value.** Interested policy makers and program developers can visit and get to know and become advocates for the local intermediary organizations at work in their communities.
- **Included in legislation and regulations.** Local intermediary organizations can be included as legitimate entities in legislative language and made eligible for technical assistance and training grants.
- **Funded.** Few public funding sources exist to support the core functions intermediaries perform. Specifically, collaboration, coordination, and ongoing leadership development need sustainable funding in order for intermediaries to realize their potential.
- **Connected to each other.** Ensuring that local intermediary organizations have vehicles for communicating with each other is critical to their success. Opportunities to share knowledge will be a critical link in maximizing public and private investments in local communities. The insights of intermediary organizations may well be the basis for generating models for success.

Endnotes

1 Brown, Brett B. *Tracking the Well-being of Children within States: The Evolving Federal Role in the Age of Devolution*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute, September 2001, *www.urban.org*.

2 School-to-Work Intermediary Project. *The Intermediary Guidebook: Making and Managing Community Connections for Youth*. Boston and San Francisco: Jobs for the Future and New Ways to Work, 2001, p. 4.

3 Center for the Study of Social Policy, *Toward New Forms of Local Governance: A Progress Report from the Field*. Washington DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy, September 1996, p. 1.

Resources

- *Afterschool Time: Toward a Theory of Collaborations*, G. Noam. Boston: Program in Afterschool Education and Research, Harvard Education Publishing Group, 2001.

  This paper discusses the importance of cross-institutional collaboration in the development and implementation of after school programs. Available from *http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~afterschool/publications/*.

- *Bringing It Together*, H. Blank, A. Melaville, and L. Miller. Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, 2002.

  This guide describes the experiences of nine states in which comprehensive community early childhood initiatives are underway to strengthen and expand supports and services for children from birth to five years and measurably improve readiness for school and beyond. Topics include: establishing appropriate governance structures, providing support and guidance, building broad constituencies, developing sound funding policies, facilitating planning, ensuring accountability, and designing effective evaluations. Available for $12.95 from *http://www.childrensdefense.org/pubpage.php*.

- *Building Effective Community Partnerships*, B. Potapchuk. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership and Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, 2001.

  This toolkit provides ideas and resources to help local community initiatives build the relationships among organizations and individuals that are necessary to move a systemic change agenda. It offers case study examples and a variety of tools communities can use to establish effective community partnerships. Available for $10.00 from *http://www.iel.org*.

- *Building Local Infrastructure for Youth Development: The Added Value of Intermediary Organizations*, R. Murphy. Washington, DC: Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, Academy for Educational Development, 1999.

  This report explores what capacity-building intermediary organizations (CBIs) do and what roles they play in strengthening youth development programs, practices, and policies. Profiles of 8 CBIs (7 local and one statewide) are included with highlights of their organizational origins and structures and their primary functions. To order, contact *pubsinfo@aed.org*.

- *Developing Collaborative Community Governing Bodies: Implications for Federal Policy*, M. Blank and J. Danzberger. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership, 1996.

  The objective of this paper is to help various stakeholders understand the role and function of a Collaborative Community Governing Body that supports cross-systems and cross-agency work on behalf of children, youth, and families. Email *ccs@iel.org* for copies.

- *Intermediary Guidebook: Making and Managing Community Connections for Youth, School-to-Work Intermediary Project*. Boston and San Francisco: Jobs for the Future and New Ways to Work, 2001.

  This guidebook is designed for people and organizations who are engaging in partnerships designed to promote young people's self confidence about their abilities, increase their connections to adults and opportunities, and foster the academic and work-related competencies they need to succeed. Available from *http://www.jff.org/jff/kc/library/0073*.

- *New Rules, New Roles: Preparing All Young People for a Changing World*, R. Conescu, A. Lewis, A. Mackinnon, and A. Weissberg. New York: Wallace-Readers Digest Fund, 2000.

  This report describes six initiatives that require schools, youth serving organizations, employers, and post-secondary institutions to work in partnership. Available to download at *http://www.wallacefunds.org/frames/framesetpublications.htm*.

- *The Role of Local Intermediary Organizations in the Youth Development Field*, J. Wynn. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, 2001.

  This paper looks at the role of local youth development intermediaries in assisting organizations with programmatic and organizational challenges. The challenges include the importance of defining effective practice and clarifying their accountability and the outcomes for which they are responsible. Available from *http://www2.chic.spc.uchicago.edu/ProjectsGuide/publications.lasso*.

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Partners for the Intermediaries Report

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American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) is a nonprofit professional-development organization based in Washington, DC. AYPF provides nonpartisan learning opportunities for individuals working on youth policy issues at the national, state, and local levels. Participants in these learning activities include Congressional staff and Executive Branch aides, officers of professional and national associations, Washington-based state office staff, researchers and evaluators, and education and public affairs media.

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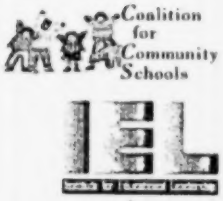
The Center for Youth Development and Policy Research was established in 1990 at the Academy for Educational Development in response to growing concern about youth. Like many organizations, the Center is dedicated to contributing to better futures for all youth in the United States. We share with many the conviction that too many children and youth are at the risk of poor outcomes because opportunities are too few, too fragmented, too problem focused, and too distant from family and neighborhood.



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The Coalition for Community Schools at the Institute for Educational Leadership is an alliance of education, youth development, family support, human services, community development, government, and philanthropic institutions, that promotes community schools. A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources, where an integrated focus on academics, services, supports, and opportunities leads to improved student learning, stronger families, and healthier communities.

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The Finance Project is a nonprofit policy research, technical assistance, and information organization that was created to help improve outcomes for children, families, and communities nationwide. Its mission is to support decision making that produces and sustains good results for children, families, and communities by developing information, knowledge, tools, and technical assistance for improved policies, programs, and financing strategies.

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Jobs for the Future believes that all young people should have a quality high school and postsecondary education, and that all adults should have the skills needed to hold jobs that pay enough to support a family. As a nonprofit research, consulting, and advocacy organization, JFF works to strengthen our society by creating educational and economic opportunity for those who need it most.

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New Ways to Work is focused on improving the lives of our nation's youth. New Ways helps communities build local systems that connect schools, community organizations, and businesses and that improve the services, educational programs, and support the community provides for its youth. New Ways creates the environment and guides a process that brings the right people together with customized tools for powerful learning—and dramatic change.

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